

MASSACRE IN BOSTON!

CAST:

Narrator
Michael Abbott
Mrs. Abbott
James Abbott
Rachel Abbott
Sam Adams
General Reed
Captain Hawley
Major Bell
Lt. Scott
Fraser
John Hancock

NARRATOR: In the 1760's, the British economy was in trouble. The British had to pay off the high cost of fighting the French and Indian War. The British Parliament decided

to raise some of the money it needed by taxing the American colonies. These new taxes angered the people of the American colonies.

Our play opens on a cold day in Boston in early March, 1770. Michael Abbott, a printer, is talking with his family after dinner.

ACT ONE

ABBOTT: James, will you bring in some more logs for the fireplaces? It will be very cold tonight.

JAMES: Yes, Dad.

MRS. ABBOTT: Will this winter weather never end!

ABBOTT: The new snow hasn't been removed from the Commons yet. I've had to walk around the square the last two days to get to the shop.

RACHEL: Father, were the British troops

marching outside the Customs House again today?

ABBOTT: No. But I saw them out on Tremayne Street. In two's and three's. Loud and drunk.

JAMES (*returning with logs*): Come Saturday night and they'll be brawling down at Daisy's place.

MRS. ABBOTT: You stay away from that tavern! Only ruffian soldiers go down there!

RACHEL: I heard at school that troops have taken over the Rogers house. That makes four houses on our block.

JAMES: Do you think they'll be housed here next?

MRS. ABBOTT: Not if I have *my* way they won't!

JAMES: And what are you going to do about it?

ABBOTT: He's right, Mary. If the military command in Boston orders troops to be housed here, we're stuck with them.

RACHEL: That's not *all* we're stuck with! The tea tax is bad enough. Now you can't even buy paper without paying a tax!

MRS. ABBOTT: Of course you can, Rachel. Only paper imported from England has the tax.

RACHEL: That's fine, Mom. But English paper is all that the stores on Ridge Street are selling.

JAMES: Right. If you want writing paper, you pay the tax.

ABBOTT: Well, at least there's no tax on news print. Or I'd be out of business.

MRS. ABBOTT: Michael, have any of those fellows from the Sons of Liberty been to see you at the shop?

ABBOTT: Not for a while. I haven't seen Adams or Hancock for more than a week.

MRS. ABBOTT: Well, I just hope they don't cause trouble and drag you into it. You're always printing those pamphlets for them — insulting Parliament or the army.

ABBOTT: Mary, some of those pamphlets make a lot of sense.

MRS. ABBOTT: Maybe so. But I don't want you getting mixed up in that type of thing.

JAMES: But Mom, the British are taxing us. Their troops are all over Boston.

MRS. ABBOTT: We're British too! Don't forget that!

RACHEL: Then why does the British army need to be in Boston? There are no hostile Indians in 200 miles! What are they protecting us from?

ABBOTT: A good question, Rachel. And if we are British, Mary, why aren't we treated as the British are back home? I don't know where all this talk and all those meetings and pamphlets and petitions will lead. But the sight of troops on Boston streets just makes the problem worse. Well, we'd better be going to bed now. James, put some more logs on the bedroom fireplaces and lock the back door.

SCENE TWO

NARRATOR: The following morning, Michael Abbott goes to his print shop. There to meet him is Sam Adams, one of the leaders of the colonial protests.

ABBOTT: Hello, Sam. Where have you been these days?

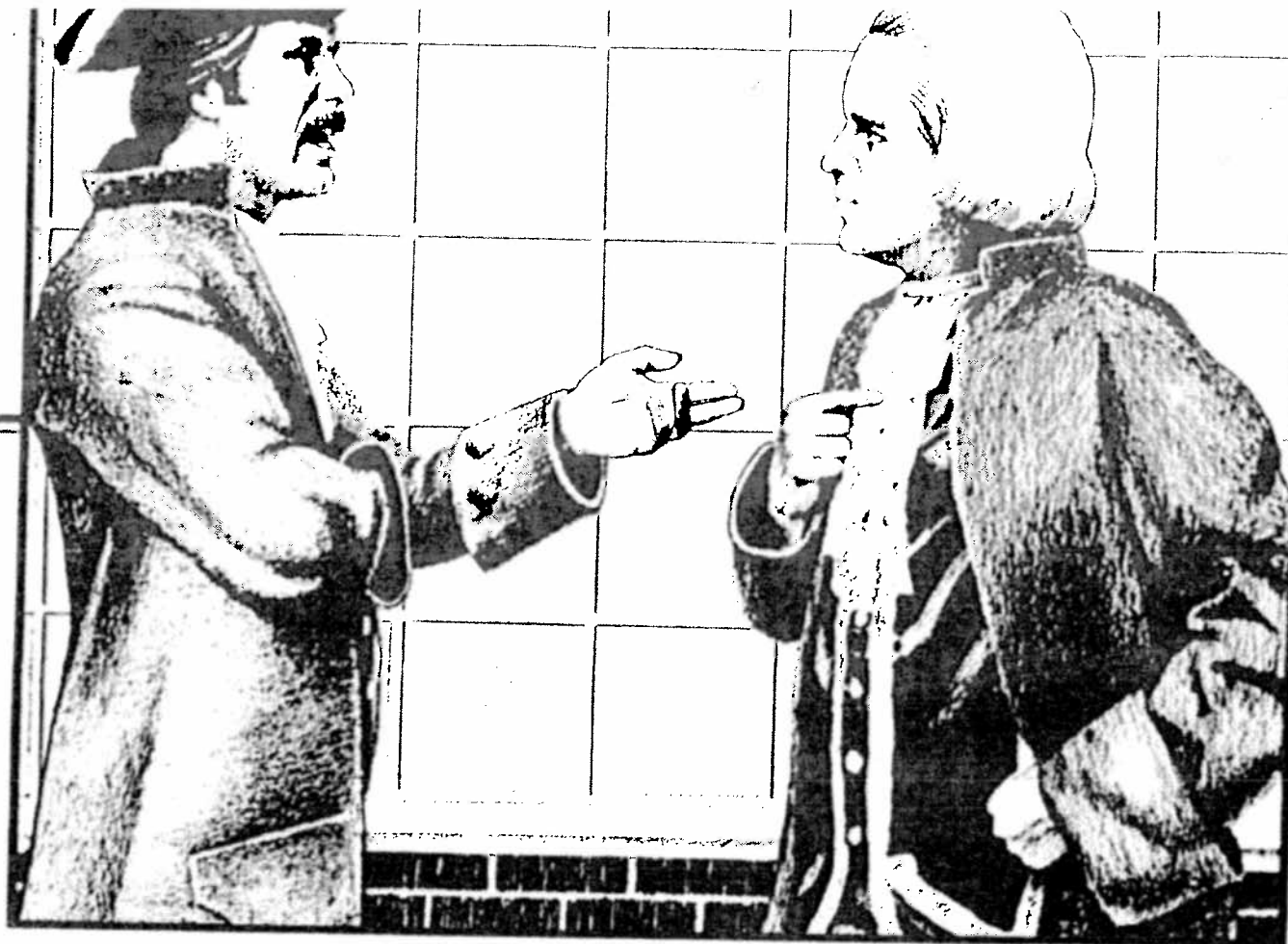
ADAMS: Out in Lexington. Can we talk privately, Abbott? I don't think it's wise for us to stand here out in the open.

ABBOTT: You're letting your imagination get the best of you, Adams. Why are you so worried?

ADAMS: The British soldiers know me. It wouldn't be a healthy thing for you if they saw us together.

ABBOTT: Well, I don't agree. But come on in and let's start a fire and warm some coffee. Now, what's on your mind?

ADAMS: I need the use of your printing press again.



ABBOTT: Another pamphlet?

ADAMS: No. A petition. But this time I want copies passed out all over Boston before we deliver it to the British commander. The Sons of Liberty and other groups are going to petition the British to move their soldiers out of Boston homes and back to the barracks — where they belong.

ABBOTT: OK, Sam. But we'd better run it off tonight. I'll set the type myself. Nobody else in the shop will know about it.

ADAMS: Good. Here's the copy to set.

ABBOTT: Listen, Sam. I've heard stories about some groups hiding arms in the area around Lexington.

ADAMS: Where'd you hear that?!

ABBOTT: From your cousin John.

ADAMS: Why can't he keep his mouth shut! Look, Abbott, there's no law against keeping arms.

ABBOTT: Maybe not. But what are they for?

ADAMS: For protection.

ABBOTT: Against Indians, no doubt.

ADAMS: Against whatever we need protection from. What about the petition?

ABBOTT: I'll have it by midnight. Leave by the back door. You were right about us not being seen together.

ACT TWO

Narrator: At the headquarters of the British commander in Boston, General Reed talks with the captain of a British merchant ship just in from London.

REED: Captain Hawley, how does the British Parliament feel about the colonies lately?

HAWLEY: General, neither Parliament nor the King is going to back down on the question of taxes. My wife seems to think that the King is getting bad advice, though.

REED: Your *wife*! What does your wife know of the King's advisers?

HAWLEY: Her favorite cousin is married to Lord North. And my wife says that if the King is getting his advice from Lord North, he's getting bad advice!



REED: Ha! A bit of jealousy there!

HAWLEY: Perhaps. But my friends feel the same way. William Pitt has grown old and feeble. He no longer has the respect of King and Parliament. I'm worried about where it will all lead.

REED: The people in Boston go crazy over a few taxes. Our tax collectors are in danger. We've had to put armed guards around them.

HAWLEY: You know, I've heard my men talking on the ship. They don't believe the taxes are fair. And it's true that these colonists don't act or feel like Englishmen. They're growing away from the mother country.

REED: Well, Captain, you're the one bringing in all those supplies that we tax.

HAWLEY: That's true, General. But that's my job.

MAJOR BELL (entering): Sir, there's trouble up at Scollay Square! A crowd has gathered and the tax collectors' offices are threatened.

REED: But we have troops there to guard those offices.

MAJOR BELL: Not enough, sir. One of the men just rode in. He says the guards cannot control the mob.

REED: You see the trouble we have with these people, Hawley. They're impossible! Let's go, Major. I want a company of men with us.

SCENE TWO

NARRATOR: Later that day, a meeting takes place at a Boston tavern.

LT. SCOTT: Well, Fraser, I'm glad you made it here. I've a new job for you — tonight.

FRASER: Listen, Scott, these meetings have to be moved to another place. The protesters are becoming suspicious.

LT. SCOTT: OK. From now on, we'll meet outside Boston. Maybe at a country tavern.

FRASER: No! No! That won't do! I tell you they're on to me!

LT. SCOTT: Settle down, Fraser. Have a mug of ale. It'll calm your nerves. How about Daisy's place down near the docks?

FRASER: No. Everyone knows that British officers go to Daisy's. But I know another place nearby.

LT. SCOTT: All right. What are you worried about? I'm not in uniform. We look and sound like two Boston citizens having a bit of ale before going home to dinner.

FRASER: Maybe we do and maybe we don't. But I get a funny feeling — especially around that John Hancock — that they know I'm a spy for the British.

LT. SCOTT: You weren't followed?

FRASER: No. But time's running out on me.

LT. SCOTT: Listen to me. There's going to be another of those meetings at the Old South Meeting House tonight. I want you to go. Report back to me what takes place. I'll be at headquarters. Never mind how late it is. We must know what their next move is to be.

FRASER: I'll not come to British headquarters. Someone will see me.

LT. SCOTT: OK. Then meet me from now on at Jack Bates' Tavern on the Commons, across from the Governor's House. I'll be at the back table.

FRASER: What about my money?

LT. SCOTT: I'll have it with me tonight. Now remember to get the names of those who show up at the meeting. We already know the leaders. But we must know what they decide.

ACT THREE

NARRATOR: The colonists at the meeting approve Sam Adams' idea to give a petition to the British. The following day — March 5, 1770 — Adams, John Hancock, Michael Abbott, and others carry the petition to the commander of the British forces in Boston. The petition asks that British troops be re-

moved from the streets and homes of Boston and returned to their barracks.

GEN. REED: Well, well. Back again, Hancock. What's the problem now?

HANCOCK: The people of Boston demand that you remove your troops and keep them in barracks.

GEN. REED: The people of Boston *demand!* I suppose *you* represent the people of Boston.

ADAMS: We represent enough merchants, businessmen, and farmers to speak for a large number of local citizens.

GEN. REED: All right. You can leave the petition here.

ADAMS: Where it will rot!

GEN. REED: Then why bring it here if that's how you feel?

HANCOCK: Because we wanted to hand you a copy personally. You see, this is not the only copy. We've handed it out all over Boston.

GEN. REED: You know that such petitions can get you all in trouble. There's a law against printing false statements and insulting the King.

ABBOTT: I printed that petition, General. And it has no false statements — just the facts. As for the King, you can judge for yourself whether the truth is an insult!

GEN. REED: We can do more than that!

ADAMS: Reed, haven't you any idea how serious this is? The sight of your troops in this city makes the people angry. Boston doesn't need protection. You're here to enforce unpopular laws.

HANCOCK: These soldiers add to the problem. One of these days there's going to be a fight and everybody will be sorry.

GEN. REED: Listen, you and your petitions aren't going to...

ABBOTT: What's that noise?

ADAMS: Across the street! A crowd has formed in front of the Customs House!

NARRATOR: Everyone in the room rushes to the front windows.

GEN. REED: That's a shot!

ABBOTT: Your men are the ones with the guns, General.

GEN. REED: My men are in danger! That mob is out of control. They're throwing rocks at the guards.

HANCOCK: My God! They're going to fire into the crowd!

GEN. REED: Nonsense! My officers can handle this.

ADAMS: Another shot! The crowd is charging! They'll be killed!

ABBOTT: Oh no! A volley of fire! Men are dying down there in the snow! There's blood all over the street!

ADAMS: General, if you don't get down there and stop it, we're going to hold you personally responsible for any deaths! Now, what are you going to do?!

GEN. REED: You people stay here! I'll handle this!

NARRATOR: But it was too late. Three citizens lay dead in the snowy street. Eight were wounded. Four of them would die of their wounds within a few days. Did the soldiers fire because they were scared of the crowd, or were they ordered to fire?

ACT FOUR

NARRATOR: A public meeting is called the following night. The leaders of the protest demand that British troops be removed. And they demand punishment of those who did the shooting. The meeting goes on for hours, each side having its say. But Adams and Hancock leave early. They believe that talking to the British officials is useless. A few nights later, they meet in a deserted farmhouse near Lexington.

The killing of unarmed colonists by British troops would be enough of a spark to arouse all of the American colonies. But in the days before television or telegraph, the colonial leaders needed to find a way to spread the

word of the "Boston Massacre" — as it came to be called.

ADAMS: Men, I propose a plan of action that would let every citizen of the 13 colonies know what has happened. We shall begin a secret organization throughout the colonies — writing letters and pamphlets. This way any news in any part of the colonies will be known in all parts of the colonies.

HANCOCK: We all have contacts and friends — in New York, South Carolina, Philadelphia, and other places. Some of them are important people. They feel as we do about the British. Stories of British wrongdoings in any place will be published everywhere.

ABBOTT: Do you think my press can print enough pamphlets?

HANCOCK: Certainly. I want to be able to send out the complete story of the massacre to every city in the colonies.

ADAMS: And that's only the beginning. But we've got to do this secretly. British spies are everywhere.

HANCOCK: Like that guy Fraser. He's been to most of our secret meetings. I think he's working for the British.

ABBOTT: Maybe. But I talked to him about the massacre yesterday. He seemed to be very upset.

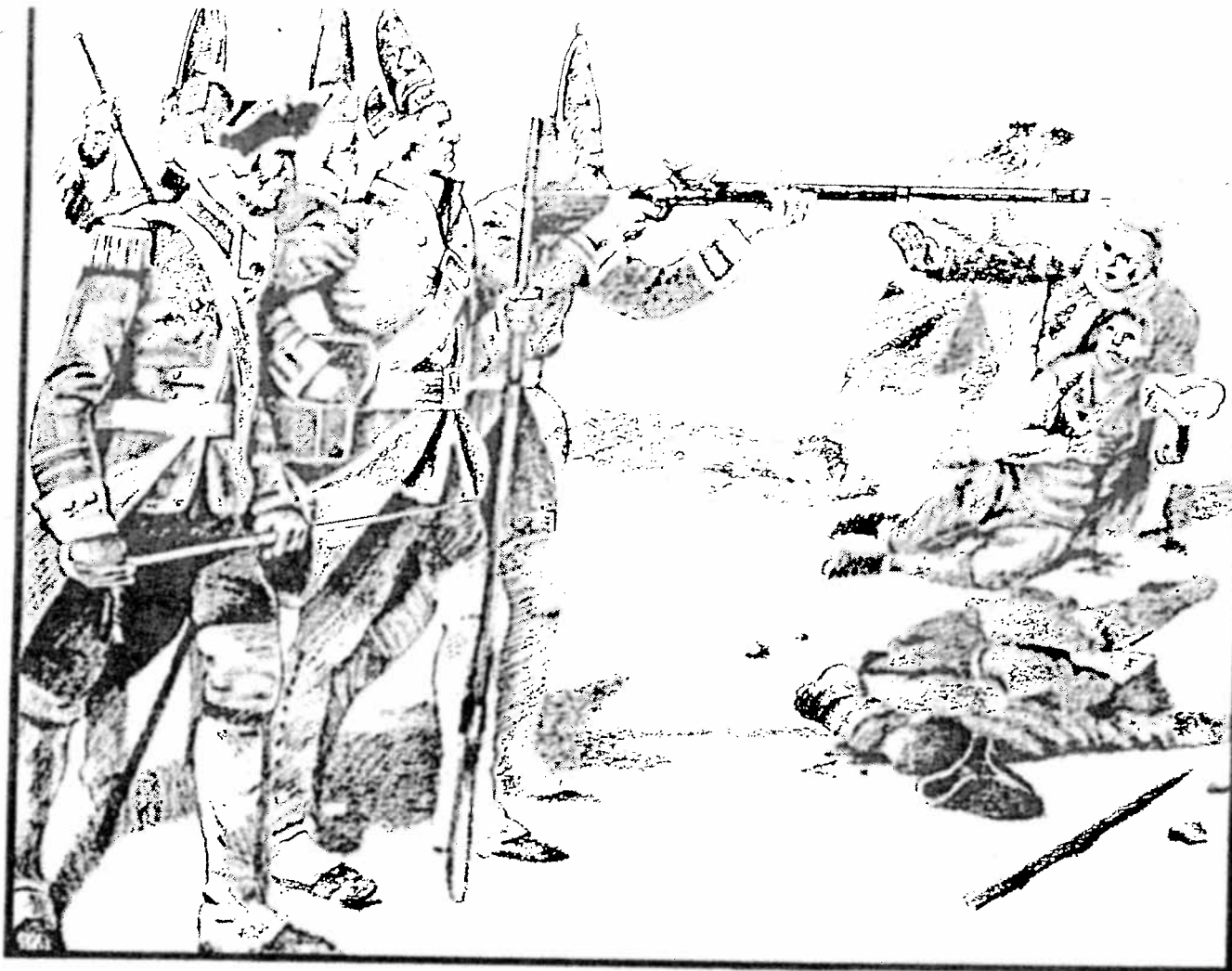
HANCOCK: Maybe so. But until I'm sure of him, I don't want him to know anything about this.

ADAMS: You may not be able to do anything about that. Fraser has good contacts. He's always picking up information. He probably knows about *this* meeting.

HANCOCK: Well, if we ever get raided here, we'll know to blame him. Now let's get out of here. We've got a lot of work to do.

SCENE TWO

NARRATOR: At Jack Bates' Tavern on Boston Commons, Fraser meets Lt. Scott. He



reports on the latest move by the colonial protesters.

FRASER: You're in trouble.

LT. SCOTT: What happened last night? Those troublemakers left the meeting hours before it ended.

FRASER: They decided to flood the colonies with pamphlets of the massacre.

LT. SCOTT: It *wasn't* a massacre! Our troops were threatened.

FRASER: Well, *that's* what it's being called. Keep your voice down.

LT. SCOTT: You mean to tell me that all they're doing is printing another pamphlet?

FRASER: Not just one. The story of your activities is going out to all the colonies. A Committee of Correspondence, they're calling it.

LT. SCOTT: Ha! That's useless.

FRASER: You think so? What if everyone in the colonies reads Sam Adams' account of that shooting? And his account of the housing of British troops in Boston homes? And

the tea tax? And dishonesty of tax collectors?

LT. SCOTT: All lies!

FRASER: So you say. But will people believe *you* or *them*? You are the unwelcome ones. I'm getting *out*. Get yourself another spy.

LT. SCOTT: I'll give you more money.

FRASER: Keep your money. I don't want any more of it. Your armies aren't going to be able to defend you against the truth. When these pamphlet writers get through, you'll have a revolt on your hands. This Boston Massacre is the spark they needed. And you gave it to them.

NARRATOR: Fraser was right. Anger toward British rule grew. For five years, the colonies matched wits with the British. Finally, a British general was ordered to arrest Sam Adams and John Hancock. As the British army marched out to make the arrests, the farmers and townspeople of Lexington and Concord stood firm and fought. The Revolutionary War had begun.

Massacre In Boston

1. Below, list the characters who are members of the Sons of Liberty.
2. List the characters who are members of the British Army.
3. Which character is a British spy?
4. In act one, how does the Abbot family describe the behavior of the British soldiers quartered in Boston?
5. What taxes are mentioned in act one?
6. In act one, what does Sam Adams want Michael Abbot to print?
7. In act 3, what does the petition that is given to the British commander ask the British to do?
8. What do the Sons of Liberty do with the petition before giving it to the British commander?
9. What event does Adams, Hancock and Abbot hear taking place outside of the British commander's window?
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